

Tribe's bullpen takes loss in opener Sowers kept Twins scoreless through seven innings

By Anthony Castrovence / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- For those feeling a strange sense of nostalgia for those tortured, troubled times when no lead was safe in the hands of the Indians' bullpen, behold what transpired Monday night.

With an eighth-inning meltdown at the Metrodome, the Tribe 'pen turned what had been a three-run lead built on an outstanding start from Jeremy Sowers into a 6-3 loss to the Twins in the series opener.

This was a return to the bad old days -- specifically, the first half of a 2009 season that was quickly compromised by a bumbling bullpen.

Chris Perez and Tony Sipp were responsible for this trip back in time, and it was a bumpy ride for a Tribe team that has now dropped 11 out of 14. Sipp left a pair of runners aboard for Perez, and, six runs later, the Tribe's three-run lead had turned into a three-run deficit.

"We were in a great position to win the ballgame," manager Eric Wedge said. "We just gave it back to them."

The Tribe was in a position to win because of Sowers' seven scoreless innings. He had turned in seven scoreless in a win over the Mariners on July 25, so his performance on this night was not without precedent this season.

Still, this was another strong step forward for Sowers, who has produced quality starts in six of his last nine outings, after developing a reputation as a guy who falls apart the second or third time through an opponent's lineup.

Sowers had no such trouble in this one. Though the Twins presented their share of scoring opportunities, Sowers continually found a way to shut them down. He gave up just six hits with two walks and two strikeouts, stranding a pair of runners in the first, third and seventh innings.

"It helped to get the leadoff guy out [in the first five innings]," Sowers said. "Especially against this team, because they like to bunt and move guys over. Taking that element out of it was important."

Wedge felt it was important for Sowers to get through the seventh. It was no easy feat for Sowers, considering he gave up a leadoff single to Delmon Young, followed by a walk to Matt Tolbert. But he got Carlos Gomez to go down swinging, Nick Punto to ground into a fielder's choice and Denard Span to fly out, capping a strong outing, in which he threw 104 pitches.

"He had worked pretty hard," Wedge said. "He had done his job."

As for the job turned in by the Tribe's bats, they didn't exactly pound former friend Carl Pavano into submission, but two big swings put the Indians in the driver's seat early.

After Lou Marson drew a walk to open the third, fellow rookie Trevor Crowe smacked a 1-1 pitch exactly 401 feet out to right-center field for his first homer, giving the Indians a 2-0 lead. Crowe has just 22 homers in 426 career Minor League games, so such pop is not exactly expected. But the Indians weren't going to complain.

In the fourth, Choo added to the lead with a leadoff shot to left, making it 3-0.

That lead was safe with Sowers, but not with the 'pen.

Sipp came on in the eighth, and leadoff man Orlando Cabrera reached on Asdrubal Cabrera's fielding error at short. Perhaps rattled by the error, Sipp surrendered a walk to Joe Mauer, squandering what was supposed to be a left-on-left advantage.

With two on, Wedge played the percentages and turned to the right-handed Perez, who had allowed just two runs over his previous 23 innings of work.

Everything that followed was ugly.

Hoping to induce a groundball, Perez instead left a fastball over the middle to Michael Cuddyer, who pounded the pitch out to center field with a 429-foot blast that tied the game at 3.

"I found too much of the plate," Perez said. "That pitch to Cuddyer was right over the middle."

Perez retired Brendan Harris for the inning's first out, but he let runners on the corners with singles from Young and Tolbert. Perez then uncorked a wild pitch -- a slider that got away from Marson -- that allowed Young to score the go-ahead run from third.

"I was trying to get a groundball and get out of the inning with as little damage as possible," Perez said.

But the damage wasn't done. Pinch-hitter Jason Kubel was in the box for that wild pitch. And after Young scored, Perez tossed Kubel a meaty fastball that was sent sailing 391 feet out to right for the two-run blast that sealed it. The Indians put a pair aboard against Joe Nathan in the ninth, but they didn't recover.

Now, in fairness, Sipp and Perez are a large part of the reason the Indians' bullpen has shown so much improvement in the second half. So while this loss was an ugly trip down memory lane, it didn't leave Wedge with the same befuddled, bewildered state of mind that plagued him back in April and May.

"I think we made some young mistakes on the mound and paid for it," Wedge said. "Those two young men [Sipp and Perez] have come a long way in a short time this year. As tough as it is right now, they'll be better for it."

Anthony Castrovence is

**Prospect Knapp scheduled for surgery
Shoulder expected to recover for Spring Training**

Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- Less than two months after the Indians made him a key acquisition in the trade that sent reigning Cy Young Award winner Cliff Lee to the Phillies, Jason Knapp is headed to the surgeon's table.

Knapp, a hard-throwing, 19-year-old right-hander, will have arthroscopic surgery on his right shoulder Tuesday, head athletic trainer Lonnie Soloff announced Monday. The procedure will be performed by Dr. David Altchek in New York City.

The Indians knew they were receiving damaged goods, to some degree, when they acquired Knapp as part of the six-player trade in which they parted with Lee and outfielder Ben Francisco and also received right-hander Carlos Carrasco, catcher Lou Marson and infielder Jason Donald. But the fact that Knapp has loose bodies in his shoulder and needs surgery was information the club was not privy to on July 29.

Yet Knapp is expected to make a full recovery from the surgery in time to have a normal Spring Training, Soloff said. The Indians still like Knapp, so they will not, according to general manager Mark Shapiro, be filing a grievance against the Phillies.

Still, Monday's news made it clear the Indians didn't know the full extent of what they were getting into when they acquired Knapp.

"In the case of trades, you request all the information that's available," Soloff said. "The information we reviewed, and the conversations from doctor to doctor and medical staff to medical staff, did not reveal any pathology that would warrant surgical intervention."

But Soloff made it clear that he did not believe the Phillies hid anything from the Tribe. They simply had never subjected Knapp, who was on the DL at Class A Lakewood with right biceps tendinitis at the time of the trade, to an MRI. So the Phillies had no MRI for the Tribe to review, and the Indians were not in a position to request one.

"I don't think Philly was disingenuous at all," Soloff said. "Having said that, this was clearly a pre-existing condition."

Knapp was in the midst of a return-to-throw program when he changed organizations. He recovered enough to make four starts for his new team at Lake County, posting a 5.40 ERA. But toward the end of the season, he complained of lingering soreness and was shut down.

The Indians' medical staff examined Knapp and determined surgery was necessary. Altchek provided a second opinion and concurred with that diagnosis.

Should Knapp recover as planned, the Indians view him as a power arm with high upside. His fastball has been clocked at 98 mph, and he struck out 123 batters in 97 innings this season.

But in a high-profile trade that didn't sit well with the fan base, the Indians haven't gotten much in the way of immediate returns. Knapp is bound for surgery, Carrasco has a 9.64 ERA in three starts, and Donald landed on the DL at Triple-A Columbus with a lower back injury that prevented him from being ready for a September promotion

**Wedge meets with players to refocus
Cleveland (61-82) at Minnesota (72-72), 8:10 p.m. ET**

Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- Clubs that have been out of contention since June aren't usually called together for team meetings in mid-September.

But Tribe manager Eric Wedge, who is not exactly leading the league in job security these days, felt it was important to speak with his players before Monday's series opener with the Twins.

Until recently, Wedge's Indians had been putting together a strong second half, playing their best baseball after of a rash of July trades that completely reshaped the roster. But the Indians entered this three-game series -- a series that continues Tuesday night at the Metrodome -- having lost 10 of 13 and 11 of 15. A rookie-laden roster had begun to look like, well, a rookie-laden roster.

With 20 games to go, entering the series, Wedge wanted to ensure his players didn't lose their focus down the stretch.

"I wanted to make sure everybody's clear that everything we do matters," Wedge said. "Every day, you're getting better or you're getting worse. There's no in-between."

Wedge wasn't motivated purely by self-interest. After all, the front office has made it clear that the ongoing evaluation of Wedge and his coaches is as much, if not more, about player development as the wins and losses in a lost season.

But Wedge's teams, no matter the standings, have a history of showing no quit in them, and he didn't want this team to throw on the cruise control in the season's waning weeks.

"I've seen some things I'm not crazy about," Wedge said, without getting into details. "We have a lot of young people up here, and we want to make sure they understand the way we go about things."

Pitching matchup

CLE: RHP Fausto Carmona (3-10, 6.48 ERA)

Suffice to say the experiment to cure Carmona in the Minors has not yet panned out as hoped. Although Carmona has shown flashes since his return to the bigs, he's still an inconsistent mess on the mound. That was evident in his loss to the Rangers on Sept. 9 in which he coughed up five runs on six hits with a walk, a strikeout and two homers in just two-thirds of an inning -- the shortest start of his career.

MIN: RHP Scott Baker (13-8, 4.33 ERA)

Baker pitched well once again Thursday, allowing just three runs over 6 2/3 innings to the Blue Jays, but suffered his first loss since July 7. The right-hander has been the Twins' best pitcher over the past two months, having put together an 11-game unbeaten streak prior to this latest loss. While Baker said his location wasn't the greatest in the start at Toronto, he scattered just five hits while walking four and striking out seven.

Tidbits

Double-A Akron opens the Eastern League finals in Connecticut at 6:45 p.m. ET Tuesday. It's a best-of-five series. Josh Tomlin will start Game 1. ... Entering Monday's games, Justin Masterson (11th, 3.23 ERA), Aaron Laffey (17th, 3.49) and Jeremy Sowers (20th, 3.62) all ranked among the top 20 in the American League in second-half ERAs. ... Short-season Mahoning Valley fell, 3-0, to Staten Island in the first game of the New York-Penn League championship finals. It's a best-of-three series. ... For more info and analysis of all things Tribe, visit the [CastroTurf](http://castrovince.mlblogs.com) blog at <http://castrovince.mlblogs.com>.

Smith continues therapy in Cleveland Indians still think righty will pitch again this season

Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- Joe Smith had hoped to be throwing off a mound in the Metrodome on Monday as a significant step toward returning from a left knee injury.

Instead, Smith remains back in Cleveland, as the Indians placed him on the 15-day disabled list, retroactive to Sept. 1. Smith, who hasn't pitched since Aug. 29, is on the DL for the second time this season. He had a rotator cuff strain that kept him on the DL from May 2 to June 9.

Head athletic trainer Lonnie Soloff said Smith remained in Cleveland so he could continue receiving aquatic therapy. Smith played catch again Monday and is still progressing toward mound work.

"We're still optimistic he'll pitch again this year," Soloff said.

What a year it's been for Smith. In addition to the knee and shoulder problems, he battled a viral infection and a finger strain in Spring Training. He had a rough first half but was just beginning to cement his standing in the back end of the Tribe 'pen when he injured his knee while walking down steps at his home on an August off-day.

Smith, acquired from the Mets last offseason in the three-team trade that sent Franklin Gutierrez to the Mariners, has a 3.44 ERA in 37 appearances this season.

Also on Monday, the Indians officially placed Grady Sizemore on the DL, retroactive to Sept. 4. Sizemore had season-ending arthroscopic surgery on his left elbow last week and is still expected to undergo a second surgery to address an unstable left abdominal wall on Wednesday.

Soloff said Sizemore is doing well post-surgery.

"He'll visit with [team medical director Dr. Mark Schickendantz] on Tuesday," Soloff said. "If he's comfortable, he'll stay on as planned for the abdominal surgery in Philadelphia."

Dr. Bill Meyers will perform that second procedure.

With the DL moves, the Indians' active roster now stands at 30 players

Oh boy, sleep! That's where I'm a viking!"

By Anthony Castrovince/MLB.com

My flight to Minneapolis was packed with Vikings fans who were headed home happy after a victory over the Browns (shocker) on Sunday.

I was not as happy, because it appears Brett Favre has not yet met his new teammate, Bernard Berrian (who also, sadly, is the No. 2 wideout on the Marinara Mudslingers, which says a lot about my drafting skills and the woes of competing in a watered-down, 14-team league). The doughnut the pair produced on Sunday has left the 'Slingers in what appears to be an inescapable hole heading into the Monday night games.

My goal on this trip, then, is to make it to the Vikings' complex to make sure Favre and Berrian are properly introduced. It couldn't hurt their chemistry.

EXCRUCIATING MINUTIAE OF THE DAY...

- I know Jason Knapp is expected to be fully recovered from his shoulder arthroscopy by Spring Training, but seriously... how bad does that Cliff Lee trade look right now? It was already dubbed by some in July to be the most unpopular trade made by the Tribe since the Rocky Colavito deal, and now, among the four acquisitions, you've got two guys hurt and one guy posting a 9.64 ERA in the big leagues. The Indians can only hope this haul has a happy ending after a less-than-auspicious start.
- Eric Wedge isn't going down without a fight. He called the team together before tonight's game for a meeting, which can only be described as rare for an out-of-contention club in September. Wedge's message was simple: He doesn't like what he's seen the past couple weeks (the Indians, in case you lost track, have lost 10 of 13 and 11 of 15), and, with 20 games remaining on the '09 slate, he wants to see them finish strong. "Every day, you're getting better or you're getting worse," Wedge told reporters after the meeting. "There's no in-between."
- This is the Tribe's final visit to the Metrodome. Wedge, for one, won't miss it. When a Minneapolis-based reporter asked him if there are any Metrodome "quirks" he wishes could be taken to the new place, Wedge had nothing to offer. "This place gets loud," Wedge said. "Twenty thousand [fans] here sounds like 40,000 anywhere else. They've had a lot of success here and a lot of success late in games here. You can't deny that."
- The Indians still hope to get Joe Smith back by the end of the year. Lonnie Soloff said the plan is for Smith to begin throwing off a mound by the end of the week.

- I found this interesting. Branching off the Knapp conversation, Soloff said the Indians subject all of their pitchers taken in the first five rounds of the Draft to an MRI. That way, the club has a picture of what the pitcher's arm looks like when he is pain-free. Should the pitcher become injured at any point down the road, the Indians have that MRI to serve as a comparison to the pitcher's current state.
- Why didn't Lou Marson catch Carlos Carrasco yesterday? Wedge has made it clear he wants all the young arms to get acclimated to all the young catchers, and he doesn't feel it benefits the ballclub to get locked into any concrete pairings a la Kelly Shoppach-Cliff Lee. Occasionally, a veteran pitcher will get locked in with a catcher, but Wedge doesn't want that to be the norm.
- Kerry Wood has now finished 45 games. He'd have to finish one out of every two games down the stretch for his \$11 million vesting option for 2011 to kick in. Wedge said Wood's role will not change down the stretch. He won't make it a point to get other, young arms a chance to finish off close games if Wood is available in his usual role.
- Double-A Akron opens the Eastern League finals in Connecticut at 6:45 p.m. ET Tuesday. It's a best-of-five series. Josh Tomlin will start Game 1.
- Short-season Mahoning Valley begins the New York-Penn League finals tonight at Staten Island with right-hander Brett Brach on the hill.
- Justin Masterson (11th, 3.23 ERA), Aaron Laffey (17th, 3.49) and Jeremy Sowers (20th, 3.62) all rank among the top 20 in the AL in second-half ERAs

Knapp headed for surgery by Sheldon Ocker on September 14, 2009

MINNEAPOLIS: Never a dull moment for Indians prospects, even when they're not on the field. [ep
Right-hander Jason Knapp, acquired from the Phillies as part of the Cliff Lee trade, will undergo surgery today in New York. Dr. David Altchek will perform an arthroscopic procedure to remove loose bodies from the 19-year-old's right shoulder. [ep
"He's expected to make a full recovery in time for spring training," said Tribe head trainer Lonnie Soloff on Monday. [ep
That means Knapp should be 100 percent by February, making it unnecessary to limit his baseball activities. [ep
Altchek's opinion was sought after Indians team orthopedist Mark Schickendantz initially recommended surgery. [ep
The operation is not considered major in a baseball sense, because neither the rotator cuff nor the labrum is involved. It might be disturbing to some, however, that Knapp was on the minor-league disabled list with what was described as biceps tendinitis when the trade was consummated. [ep
Is Knapp's current problem related to the biceps tendinitis? [ep
"I think it is," Soloff said. "The presence of loose bodies carry symptoms of biceps tendinitis." [ep
So why didn't the Phillies or the Indians connect the dots before now? [ep
"The (medical) information provided by the Phillies and reviewed (by Tribe doctors) did not indicate that surgery should be anticipated." [ep
At the time of the transaction, Knapp was still on the minor-league disabled list but was engaging in a long toss program from 120 feet and "had no symptoms," Soloff said. [ep
Soloff added that had Knapp undergone a prior MRI scan, his current condition probably would have come to light. As a matter of form, when the team is ready to pull the trigger on a trade, Tribe doctors ask for all of the player's medical records and present a series of questions, one of which is, "Have you ever done an MRI on this player?" [ep
It is standard procedure for the Indians' first five draft picks to undergo MRI scans of their shoulders and elbows. Apparently, the Phillies do not act similarly. [ep
General Manager Mark Shapiro said the Tribe will not file a grievance asking for compensation because Knapp was damaged goods when he was acquired. [ep
"I don't think in any conversations we had with the Phillies or what was provided (by them), were they disingenuous at all," Soloff said. "Having said that, clearly this was a pre-existing condition." [ep
LET'S TALK — It's late in the season, the Indians are going nowhere in the standings, but manager Eric Wedge held a 10-minute team meeting Monday. [ep
"There are 20 games left, and I want to make sure that everything matters," he said. "Every day, you get better or you get worse, there's no in-between. That was the gist of it." [ep
Wedge was noticing things he didn't like, maybe some bad habits that led to the club's 3-10 record in the past 13 games. [ep
"There were a few things I wasn't crazy about," the manager said. "We have a lot of young people here. I want to make sure they know how we go about things." [ep
DL PICTURE — Grady Sizemore was placed on the disabled list last Friday (with no announcement), and Joe Smith (sprained left knee) joined him Monday, retroactive to Sept. 1. [ep
"Joe played catch today," head trainer Lonnie Soloff said. "We are still optimistic that he will pitch this year. If he progresses well, he will throw off a mound later this week." [ep
Sizemore underwent surgery last week to remove inflammation from the lining of his left elbow. He will be checked today to make sure he can keep his Wednesday appointment to have surgery to repair the lining of his abdomen. [ep
NO LAMENTATIONS — The Tribe is playing its final series in the Metrodome. Next year, the Twins will open Target Field, their new downtown, open-air ballpark. [ep
"I'm looking forward to the new place," Wedge said. "This ballpark has definitely been an advantage for them." [ep
Minnesota has long benefitted from the Metrodome's artificial surface (especially when the floor was covered with AstroTurf) and the increased decibels caused by the roof. [ep
"Twenty thousand people sound like 40,000 in most places," Wedge said. "They've had a lot of success here and won a lot of games late." [ep
PADDING HIS RESUME — Matt LaPorta started at first base for the second time in his infant big-league career. His first start was back on May 12. [ep

Minnesota steals victory over Indians It all falls apart for Tribe in the eighth inning, after Sowers leaves

By Sheldon Ocker
Beacon Journal sports writer
POSTED: 12:04 a.m. EDT, Sep 15, 2009
MINNEAPOLIS: It all felt achingly familiar to Indians fans who watched the bullpen blow fuse after fuse the first two months of the season. Eighth inning, Tribe leading 3-0. Jeremy Sowers has departed after pitching seven shutout innings. Tony Sipp takes over and bad things start to happen.
When the inning ends, the Twins have stolen a 6-3 win Monday night at the Metrodome, benefiting from bad defense and bad pitching. Embarrassing? Let's hope so.
Orlando Cabrera led off the eighth with a ground ball that Asdrubal Cabrera muffed for an error. After Joe Mauer walked, manager Eric Wedge summoned Chris Perez to pitch to Michael Cuddyer, who drilled a 3-and-1 pitch over the center field fence for a three-run homer to tie the score.

One out later, Delmon Young singled and Matt Tolbert blooped a hit into no-man's land in left, putting runners on first and third. Jason Kubel pinch hit for Carlos Gomez and swung and missed on a 2-and-1 pitch that got past rookie catcher Lou Marson for a wild pitch, enabling Young to score from third.

But don't be concerned about the wild pitch, because Kubel unloaded on a 3-and-2 pitch, hitting his 23rd home run of the year, good for two more runs. Kubel has battered the Tribe all season, compiling a .417 batting average with seven homers and 17 RBI.

One bad inning by the bullpen ruined a carefully constructed lead, built on Trevor Crowe's first major-league homer, a two-run blast in the third inning, and Shin-Soo Choo's 16th home run of the season leading off the fourth.

More than that, Sowers' excellent outing ended as an exercise in futility. He courted disaster (at least minor disaster) three times but tightroped his way out of trouble each time to complete his evening's work with seven shutout innings.

The way he began, the smart money would have bet he'd have showered, dressed and watched video of his misspent outing long before the seventh inning rolled around. But that's not how things played out.

Sowers gave up a single and double, putting runners on second and third after two were out in the first inning, but retired Brendan Harris on a long fly to right.

In the second inning, Tolbert singled with one out, and Nick Punto walked with two outs. Again, the Twins couldn't get the two-out hit.

Sowers went on an impressive run after that, retiring 12 of 14 batters through the sixth. The only Minnesota batsman to reach was Mauer, who singled in the third and sixth but was erased on a double play.

Mauer also singled in the first inning, and the way he hits Tribe pitching, a casual observer might think he never makes an out. Of course, that would be next to impossible. Mauer has been far from perfect against Cleveland this year, batting only .520 with two home runs and seven RBI.

Sowers had to get through one more ordeal before becoming a spectator. Delmon Young led off the seventh with a single and Tolbert drew a walk right behind him. Carlos Gomez struck out, Punto bounced into a force play, leaving runners on first and third, and Denard Span flied out.

In nine starts since being called up from Columbus July 25, Sowers is 4-2 with a 3.62 earned-run average.

For the second time in 10 days, Sowers was opposed by Carl Pavano, traded by the Tribe on Aug. 7. Pavano pitched well enough to win, only the two home runs marring his six-inning outing.

The last time he faced his old team, at Progressive Field, he gave up four runs in six innings, but one run was unearned. The Twins committed four errors in all, which the Tribe turned into two unearned runs to win 5-2.

Indians place Sizemore, Smith on DL

(AP)—The Cleveland Indians have placed center fielder Grady Sizemore and right-handed reliever Joe Smith on the 15-day disabled list.

Smith has a sprained left knee and didn't travel with the team to Minnesota, but manager Eric Wedge said Monday he's optimistic Smith can pitch again before the season's over. Smith's DL stint is retroactive to Sept. 1.

Sizemore had arthroscopic surgery on his left elbow last week and the three-time All-Star is scheduled for lower abdominal surgery Wednesday, so the DL move was merely procedural.

Indians trainer Lonnie Soloff also said minor league pitcher Jason Knapp will have surgery to repair a pre-existing condition in his right shoulder. Knapp was acquired from Philadelphia in the Cliff Lee trade in July.

Cuddyer's shot in 8th lifts Twins, 6-3 vs. Indians

By DAVE CAMPBELL, AP Sports Writer

Michael Cuddyer refused to let the double dose of bad news keep the Twins down.

With one eighth-inning swing, he smacked a straight-down-the-middle fastball into the football seats behind center field—giving Minnesota a big lift when it was needed most.

Cuddyer's tying three-run homer rescued the Twins, ruining a fine start for Cleveland by Jeremy Sowers in a 6-3 victory over the Indians on Monday night after Minnesota learned All-Star first baseman Justin Morneau's season is over because of a back injury.

"It's not the time to mourn it," Cuddyer said. "We can't say we're done because we lost him. We've got to keep plugging away, and he's going to be here cheering us on as hard as anybody."

Sowers stymied the Twins with his jerky left-handed delivery and left with a 3-0 lead after seven innings. Reliever Tony Sipp let the first two batters reach base in the eighth, though, the first coming on an error by shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera.

Indians manager Eric Wedge summoned the right-handed Chris Perez to face Cuddyer, who flipped his bat with a flick of the wrist as he strided toward first and handed out several hard high-fives on his approach to the plate and return to the dugout.

This came a few minutes after the out-of-town scoreboard revealed first-place Detroit's completion of a comeback from a 5-2 bottom-of-the-ninth deficit to beat Toronto. The Twins remained 5 1/2 games behind in the AL Central.

"It's fun to see those guys keep battling. That's kind of how this team is," said Morneau, who was diagnosed with a stress fracture and must rest for three months.

Perez (0-1) is no batting practice pitcher. He struck out 30 with only 10 hits and two runs allowed over his previous 23 innings. After Cuddyer's homer, however, he collapsed.

Two singles. A wild pitch that let the go-ahead run score. Then a two-run shot into the upper deck by pinch-hitter Jason Kubel.

"I got too much of the plate. That was the problem," said Perez, who sat by himself and stared into his cubicle in Cleveland's clubhouse for about five minutes before turning to take questions from reporters.

Sowers gave up six hits and threw 104 pitches. Wedge defended his decision to turn the game over to his top two setup men.

"I feel like we made some young mistakes out there on the mound," the manager said. "We paid for it. Those two young men have done a fantastic job, and they've come a long way in a short period of time this year. As tough as it is for them right now, they've got something they can learn from. They're going to be in that situation time and time again, and they should be better for it."

Carl Pavano, pitching against the Indians for the first time since they traded him to the Twins last month, was in command for six innings except for two balls his old teammates crushed. Trevor Crowe hit his first career homer, a two-run shot in the third, and Shin-Soo Choo went deep in the next inning.

Wedge was asked before the game about Choo's second-half power slump, and he expressed no concern about it because of the way he believes Choo has stayed disciplined—sidestepping temptation to swing for homers and potentially throw his approach out of whack.

Choo, in his first full season as a regular in the majors, has kept his average near .300 all summer. The right fielder from South Korea has 16 homers, but only three since July 7. Choo also went deep on Saturday against Kansas City.

The late rally made that moot. Jesse Crain and Ron Mahay (2-1) worked scoreless innings in relief, and Joe Nathan notched his 39th save—another not-so-smooth ninth inning featuring a single and a walk with two outs.

Nobody was worried about that, though. Morneau's absence and the effect on the race were the postgame focus.

"You can't do anything about it," manager Ron Gardenhire said. "We still have a job to do."

NOTES: The Twins lead the league with 135 double plays grounded into. ... Concerned about some sloppiness he's seen recently in his young club, Wedge addressed the team in a 10-minute meeting before batting practice. ... Mauer (27), Cuddyer (25), and Kubel (23) have each established career highs in homers this year

Heyman > DAILY SCOOP

Managerial breakdown: Who's staying, who's going, who's next? Story Highlights

La Russa's in the midst of a great season, but there's no guarantee he'll return

One iconic manager's contract is up at a time there have been occasional rumors of discontent.

Another ultra-accomplished manager known for his fun and fiery persona is appearing at times like he's lethargic in what is seen as one of the most fun managing jobs in the game.

And yet another Cooperstown-bound manager may not be an absolute guarantee to return.

Plus, a baker's dozen more managers are looking like they might be in at least a modicum of jeopardy as the season winds down. That brings the total to just more than half the 30 teams where there's at least some managerial intrigue.

A vast majority will likely keep their jobs (and Tony La Russa, Lou Piniella and Bobby Cox are among the many that are more likely to stay than go). Yet, several others -- especially in the non-Cooperstown category -- have to be worried today. Here is a closer look at the managers that have some chance of leaving, not being renewed, never advancing past interim status, or being fired or bought out.

The Legends

1. Tony La Russa, Cardinals. The iconic La Russa is doing one of his best jobs in his 14th season in St. Louis. But with his contract expiring at year's end and a hint of anger over the handling of the trade of longtime pitching coach Dave Duncan's son and rumors of a touch of discord with a front office member or two, there isn't quite an absolute assurance La Russa will decide to return -- though the likelihood would seem to be that he could put whatever personal differences may exist aside to return to one of baseball's best and best-run franchises. La Russa is known to be enamored managing the traditionally excellent organization in this wonderful baseball city, but it's still possible he doesn't see St. Louis' season as being as perfect as its 84-60 record would indicate.

New Cardinals GM John Mozeliak, who made at least four great in-season moves to help turn the Cardinals into perhaps the National League favorite, said by phone that he doesn't believe there are any lingering issues that would drive La Russa away. Said Mozeliak, "If he wants to back, he'll likely be back ... Obviously, he has to be pleased with where we are."

2. Lou Piniella, Cubs. The accomplished Piniella is the only manager to lead the Cubs to two straight postseasons in a century. But their dismal season seems to be weighing on him. One Cubs employee, who's a Piniella supporter, admitted the brutal seasons appeared to be dragging down Piniella after seeing him trudge through a recent series in New York. Managing Milton Bradley and Carlos Zambrano appears to have taken a toll. Last year the Cubs exercised Piniella's \$4 million option for 2010, and he told the Chicago Sun-Times he isn't walking away, so there really isn't any hard evidence he'll be going anywhere. However, Piniella has become adept at leaving less than perfect situations in mid-contract before, as he did in Seattle and Tampa Bay, so it's possible his remark about intending to stay is nothing more than the first stage of negotiation. The Sun-Times also recently said Piniella seemed "resigned" about the team's plight. The biggest question is this: Any chance he himself will resign?

3. Bobby Cox, Braves. He has been thought to have a lifetime position. But surely the Braves people expected much more this year. Speaking generally about the team's record and position, Braves GM Frank Wren said by phone, "We're all disappointed in where we are right now." Atlanta's three-game sweep of the first-place Cardinals notwithstanding, a rebuilt rotation and improved team haven't shown enough in the record so far. Cox has a special, several-decade relationship with club president John Schuerholz, and if Schuerholz has the ultimate call, Cox isn't going anywhere. Others may not be quite as wedded to Cox, though until further notice the assumption remains that he stays in place.

The Others

1. Jim Riggleman, Nationals interim. While Mike Rizzo surprised many folks by having the interim tag lifted and becoming the team's permanent general manager, it would be much more shocking than that for Riggleman to get the managing job full time. Nats president Stan Kasten said in a phone interview that Riggleman's under consideration for the job. However, baseball people consider him getting it to be a major long shot (though Kasten pointed out that reports and perceptions about the Nats haven't always turned out to be exactly on the money). Rizzo will want to put his own stamp on the situation with his own choice. Riggleman, fairly or not, has come to be viewed as a solid interim guy while managing baseball's worst two teams two years running (he took over on an interim basis in Seattle in 2008), and Rizzo is almost sure to try to identify someone seen as a more inspirational choice. It will be interesting to see whether Rizzo goes back to his Diamondback roots to find a manager (Buck Showalter and Chip Hale are names from his past, but there's no inkling he and Showalter are especially close). So far the rumor mill has been incredibly scarce on the whole score.

2. Dave Trembley, Orioles. It wasn't a good sign when Orioles upper management put off a decision on Trembley's incredibly inexpensive 2010 option (believed to be for about \$600,000) to gauge the Orioles' finish. Trembley's teams have been weak finishers, and it doesn't help him that Aubrey Huff and George Sherrill are gone in trades, or that top rookie pitchers Brian Matusz and Chris Tillman are being shelved due to innings counts. Trembley was brought in specifically because this is a rebuilding situation, as Baltimore Sun columnist Peter Schmuck recently pointed out. But at this point, there's a decent chance he won't survive to see it through.

3. Cecil Cooper, Astros. The Astros' front office usually does very little, but it still manages to expect a lot. There were rumors of Cooper's imminent demise early in the year, and the team is doing about the same now as it was then (just below .500). The Astros are doing the right thing by playing their few prospects, but that probably won't help Cooper get to .500.

4. Eric Wedge, Indians. GM Mark Shapiro, a consistently ardent supporter of Wedge, said months ago that Wedge was safe through the season. But no one has said a thing about next year. Wedge has a year to go with a seven-figure salary for 2010 (no small thing for the cash-strapped Indians), and by all accounts he's seemed as calm and consistent as ever. Is that a good sign? Or is that just Wedge? Shapiro, a believer in Wedge dating back to their days running the Indians' minors, still is seen as very likely to support a return, and ownership loves the erudite Shapiro. However, one Indians observer said things seem "stale" around the team, and ownership is still seen as having a chance to overrule Shapiro after the Indians' unexpectedly dreadful season.

5. Ken Macha, Brewers. He happily took only a two-year deal to get back to managing but has to be slightly concerned after a disappointing first season. The Brewers had great expectations after reaching the playoffs last year for the first time in 26 years, but realistically, they never had starting pitching that was either deep enough or good enough. There has been no real evidence that Macha's in trouble, and GM Doug Melvin has made supportive comments publicly. However, the Brewers took the drastic step of firing a manager with 12 games to go in the 2008 season, leading to three managers within 13 regular-season games. That managerial switch worked out, but Milwaukee probably doesn't want to obtain a trigger-happy rep. One thing to consider: they do have an obvious replacement ready in bench coach Willie Randolph.

6. Jerry Manuel, Mets. While Manuel is guiding baseball's biggest flop, the Mets led the majors by a wide margin with a whopping \$35 million lost to the disabled list at the August count. Manuel and embattled GM Omar Minaya weeks ago were given private assurances they'd return, and there is still no indication he is going to be blamed for the New York mess. Like Macha, Manuel only got a guaranteed two years on his contract. This means he is very likely to enter 2010 as a lame duck, a tough spot for a manager in New York.

7. Bob Geren, A's. Oakland has been a mostly moribund team after adding significant payroll last winter. However, Geren has the significant advantage of being iconic GM Billy Beane's best friend.

8. Cito Gaston, Blue Jays. Gaston was hailed as a hero last year and even the first half of this year, and it's more likely that if anyone goes it will be GM J.P. Ricciardi. Gaston's rep is that he is better for a veteran team, so that's a consideration as Toronto enters a rebuilding phase. However, he never should have been out of baseball for a decade, and it's highly doubtful the Jays have a better idea. Paul Beeston, in charge for the championship years, is still running the operation, probably another plus for Gaston.

9. Trey Hillman, Royals. This season is a disaster. But the Royals rewarded GM Dayton Moore with a four-year extension. So it seems highly unlikely Moore would consider changing managers now.

10. John Russell, Pirates. Tough to tell what the standards are for a team that hasn't won since a skinny Barry Bonds left town. Russell's option for 2010 was picked up months ago, so he probably stays.

11. Ozzie Guillen, White Sox. "It's my fault," Ozzie told the Chicago Tribune a couple weeks ago in a defense of his embattled coaching staff. "I am saying that right now. I am saying that tomorrow. I can say it two weeks later." That's a nice quote, but it probably won't happen. Club owner Jerry Reinsdorf is the most loyal man in baseball, and besides, Guillen was extended not too long ago. On the off chance Guillen does go, remember that Reinsdorf loves La Russa.

12. Dusty Baker, Reds. Dreadful season at \$3 mil-plus per. But he has a contract at that price for next year, as well. Little chance they want to eat that kind of cake.

13. Jim Tracy, Rockies interim. It has to be presumed he will be kept on after guiding the team out of hell to a very likely playoff spot. But since nothing has been said and he's still officially an interim manager, he makes the list. And if there will be openings, there have to be alternatives ...

The Candidates

1. Bobby Valentine. He'll be a free agent after a generally wonderful Chiba Lotte run ends this year. Perfect for rebuilding spot like the Nationals (if they're willing to pay), but would be fun with the Cubs, too.

2. John Farrell. Favorite of the Indians organization who happens to live in Cleveland.

3. Brad Mills. Well-respected Red Sox coach.
4. Buck Showalter. Brilliant and hardworking yet overbearing and controlling makes him a tough call for many.
5. Chip Hale. Diamondbacks third base coach will be a manager someday.
6. Willie Randolph. Likely the heir apparent in Milwaukee.
7. Bob Melvin. Didn't do a bad job in Arizona.
8. Clint Hurdle. Ditto in Colorado.
9. Jose Oquendo. Hot prospect had WBC trial run.
10. DeMarlo Hale. Frequent candidate.
11. Kirk Gibson. Fiery type passed over for D-backs job.
12. Rudy Jaramillo. You know he'd help the hitters.
13. Dave Duncan. You know he'd help the pitchers.
14. Terry Pendleton. But is his star down with Jeff Francoeur looking to Rudy for hitting help?
15. Mike Gallego. Personality a plus but probably a few years from consideration.
16. Tom Kelly. Have to assume he's enjoying retirement. But might old friend Andy MacPhail be tempted to lure him out of it?
17. Ryne Sandberg. He's done a nice job in the minors and he's a legend at Wrigley, so he could be a candidate for the Cubs in the near future.

Around the majors

- The Red Sox's offer for Roy Halladay is believed to have been pitching prospects Clay Buchholz, Justin Masterson, Michael Bowden, Nick Hagadone and a positional prospect, according to sources, and not the six pitching prospects that's been rumored. The bid apparently did not include Daniel Bard and Felix Doubront, as has been suggested recently. Red Sox GM Theo Epstein responded "nope" to the Boston Globe's Amalie Benjamin when quizzed about the alleged six-pitcher proposal. But even the real bid should have been good enough for Toronto to take it.
- As MLBTradeRumors.com points out, the DH market will be among the strongest this winter, with Vladimir Guerrero, Jim Thome and Hideki Matsui (having a better year than you think) all available. Plus, if anyone thinks Gary Sheffield can limp through another whole season, there's another DH.
- Guerrero aged a year this spring. And free agent close Jose Valverde just aged 15 months. Valverde said he didn't think his sudden aging would hurt him, but it's possible it'll cost him a year on what's expected to be a lucrative deal. Ten mil a year for two years doesn't seem out of the question.
- Kevin Millwood needs 4 1/3 innings to have his \$12 million option for 2010 vest.
- Rick Porcello, 20, became the 29th pitcher this century to win his 13th game in a year before turning 21. Dwight Gooden and Bob Feller were the only ones to do it twice. I am sticking with Porcello as my AL Rookie of the Year, with Elvis Andrus and Andrew Bailey rounding out my top three. But several e-mailers took me to task for not including Rays pitcher Jeff Niemann, who has slightly better overall stats than Porcello. Niemann and the White Sox's Gordon Beckham, who has done a terrific job at third base, are also in the picture.
- Prince Fielder tied the Brewers franchise record with 126 RBIs (Cecil Cooper, 1983). A couple e-mailers wondered why I didn't include Fielder in my top 10 for MVP. The reason is that I don't typically consider players on also-ran teams. While Joe Mauer (my AL MVP pick) is on a team that doesn't appear likely to reach the postseason, I am considering the Twins a September contender.
- As one e-mailer pointed out, it only makes sense that I misspelled the name of Dodgers bench coach Bob Schaefer on my list of 10 unsung heroes for the year. My bad. That is the correct spelling.
- Mark Buehrle is not only spectacular, he's consistent. He became the first ChiSox pitcher with nine 30-start seasons. Rumors that Buehrle would want to renegotiate because Jake Peavy makes slightly more are untrue, according to White Sox people. Peavy, incidentally, now appears close to making his return.
- It's fitting that ex-Met Pedro Martinez (now 218-99 all time -- he just doesn't want to lose that 100th game) officially eliminated the Mets Sunday night in a 1-0 victory.
- Brad Lidge still looks like an issue for the Phillies, however, as he looked shaky getting a save during the first game of Sunday's double-header vs. the Mets. Ryan Madson was used as closer in the 1-0 Game 2 win.

**On the Beat
Weekend Update
by John Perrotto**

Though the Cubs are playing out the string in what has turned into a disappointing season, there is still intrigue surrounding a franchise that will now make it 101 consecutive seasons without a World Series title. That's because Tom Ricketts has agreed in principle to buy the Cubs and Wrigley Field from Sam Zell and the Tribune Company for \$845 million.

No one associated with the Cubs is sure exactly what Ricketts plans to do with a team that, considered prohibitive favorites to win their third straight National League Central title when the season began, now stands 10½ games behind the first-place Cardinals in the division standings with three weeks remaining. "Everyone is kind of wondering what's going to happen," Cubs third baseman Aramis Ramirez said. Ricketts is reluctant to talk about his plans for the Cubs until the sale becomes complete sometime during the offseason. However, it would seem likely that he will have some changes in store for a team that is 72-68 after winning 97 games last season.

First baseman Derrek Lee has as good of a feel for the Cubs and their clubhouse as anyone on the roster, as he is in his sixth season with the team. He knows what he would tell Ricketts if consulted. "I know you never completely keep a team together from one year to the next, but I hope they bring back basically the same team next year," Lee said. "I don't think we need to make big changes. I think we have a good club."

The record indicates otherwise but Lee is adamant that the Cubs can contend next season with the same cast. "I know what our record is but the talent is here," Lee said. "It's just a matter of a lot of guys not having the types of seasons they normally have. It's unfortunate that so many guys haven't lived up to expectations but it's just been one of those years. It's baseball, and stuff like happens sometimes. There's really no rhyme or reason for it other than it's baseball."

General manager Jim Hendry was handcuffed from making moves during the season because of the unsettled ownership situation, and he remains in a holding pattern until Ricketts officially takes control. However, Hendry knows what he would like to do in the upcoming offseason. "I like our pitching and that's why I feel we can have a good club next year," Hendry said. "We need some offense, though. We've definitely come up short in that department this year. If you have the pitching, though, you always have a chance."

The Cubs are 10th in the National League in runs scored with an average of 4.4 a game and 12th in the league in team-wide EqA. A number of players being counted heavily have not come through. Right fielder Milton Bradley has a .279 EqA after being signed to a three-year, \$30-million contract as a free agent last winter, a far cry from his .337 mark with the Rangers in 2008. Left fielder Alfonso Soriano's EqA is .247, and he will succumb to left knee surgery after admitting this past week that he has been playing in pain most of the season. Catcher Geovany Soto's mark is .252 a year after he was the NL Rookie of the Year and delivered a .288 EqA.

The Cubs would like to add a leadoff hitter, and are said to have great interest in Angels third baseman Chone Figgins, who can become a free agent at the end of the season. The Cubs would also love to offload the final five years and \$90 million of Soriano's contract, as well as the last two years and \$21 million on Bradley's deal. However, they have almost no chance of moving Soriano, and the number of teams interested in the temperamental Bradley would seem to be limited.

At least the Cubs are fifth in the league in runs allowed at 4.2 a game. Left-hander Ted Lilly (4.4 SNLVAR, .569 SNWP), rookie Randy Wells (4.3, .563), and Carlos Zambrano (3.3, .523) have performed well, though Ryan Dempster (1.9, .457) has struggled after re-signing as a free agent for four years and \$52 million last season. Rich Harden (2.7, .502) is eligible for free agency at the end of the season and the Cubs will probably let him walk and give his spot in the rotation to left-hander Tom Gorzelanny, who was acquired from the Pirates in a trade on July 30. Some around the Cubs would not be shocked if they tried to trade Zambrano this winter, as he continues to test the patience of management with his immature behavior. In the bullpen, the Cubs made a major mistake in signing Kevin Gregg as a free agent last winter to replace Kerry Wood as closer rather than promoting set-up man Carlos Marmol, who eventually claimed the job last month. Gregg's WXRL is 0.286, while Marmol's is 3.757.

Manager Lou Piniella says he takes full responsibility for the disappointing season, though he doesn't elaborate on what exactly he should have done differently. The 67-year-old sounds like a man who will try to take one more crack at breaking the Cubs' championship drought next year before moving on as his contract expires at the end of the 2010 season. "I'm at the end of my career, and all I can do is the best I can," Piniella said. "It's been a tough year but we'll come back next year, try to enjoy ourselves and give it another shot."

As is well known, the Phillies won the last two NL East titles in dramatic fashion, rallying in September to overtake the Mets each season. They made up a seven-game deficit in the final 17 games in 2007, and came back from a 3½-game deficit in the final 16 contests last season. This season, the Phillies have been in the driver's seat in the division for much of the second half and have a five-game lead.

However, manager Charlie Manuel doesn't like the way his team has been playing with the lead as they have gone 8-10 in their last 18 games. While Manuel's removal of Brad Lidge from the closer's job has generated plenty of headlines in the last week, the manager is also perturbed with the approach of his hitters. "I think we definitely know how to play but when I see us chasing balls on the ground, chase them in the dirt, swing at balls over their heads, we're talking about professional hitters," Manuel said. "So, yeah, I started to wonder about it. I don't know what it is. Are they trying too hard? Are they tight? We have no reason to be tight. Don't tell me that being in first place with a big lead isn't better than sweating like hell in second place. But you know what? I kind of sense that with some of those at-bats we put on that we don't have a clue what we're doing. That's what I see. I know we're better than that, and it kind of eats at me."

Manuel would also like to see his entire team play with a greater sense of urgency to wrap up a third straight division title. "We played tremendous baseball last year the last five, six weeks of the season," Manuel said. "Best baseball we ever played. Well, I'll tell you what, I'm not going to give our lead up and say, 'OK, we're going to start here even in the league.' No, we're not going to do that, because I don't know if we'd come through or not. I like our chances better where we're at but, at the same time, we have to win some games."

The Nationals' Jim Riggleman finds himself finishing a second straight season as the interim manager of a team trying to avoid finishing with the worst record in the major leagues. Riggleman replaced John McLaren as the Mariners' manager last season on June 19, and they finished with the second-worst record in the majors at 61-101, a game and a half ahead of the Nationals, who finished 59-102. This year, the Nationals have the worst record at 49-93, and their next closest pursuers are the Pirates, who are 54-86.

Though the Nationals are going nowhere, Riggleman said he is hesitant to play many of the young players who have been called up since the roster limit expanded from 25 to 40 on Sept. 1. Riggleman, like Herm Edwards, believes you play to win the game. "When we play baseball, we're supposed

to try to win," Rigglesman said. "Last year in Seattle, we were trying to win. We weren't just trying to play it out and draft Steve Strasburg next year. We were trying to win the games. I think that, if I'm a paying fan, I want to see the team trying to win. I want the manager trying to win. I want intensity. I want players playing hard. I want guys running balls out. I want effort and preparation, so all those things in a perfect world will carry over into the future."

It should also be mentioned that Rigglesman is hoping to land the manager's job on a full-time basis, though it seems unlikely. However, Rigglesman said a manager's status should have nothing to do with the lineup he puts on the field. "If I send out a message to the ballclub that we're going to put our Triple-A callus out there on a daily basis to see what they can do, well, it's not a good time to evaluate talent," Rigglesman said. "Who do you do it against? Do you do it against the Phillies? I think we would be insulting the Marlins and Braves, who are chasing the Phillies. Do you do it just against the Braves but not against the Phillies? The competition throughout the league indicates that for the fairness of who is the best team in the division, you've got to put your best people out there to play against those guys."

The July 31 non-waiver trading deadline has become almost like a national holiday to baseball executives, analysts and fans. Should Congress ever officially declare it a national holiday—an extreme long shot, to be sure—perhaps they could call it Theo Epstein Day. That's because nobody has been better at the trading over the past two seasons than the Red Sox's GM.

Epstein was in a sticky situation at the deadline last season when left fielder Manny Ramirez had become such a distraction that he had to go despite his usual outstanding production. Though he had little leverage in trading Ramirez, Epstein was able to ship him to the Dodgers and only gave up reliever Craig Hansen and outfielder Brandon Moss to the Pirates as part of a three-team deal that brought in Jason Bay; Bay had a .302 EqA for the Red Sox last season and has a .306 mark this season. Meanwhile, Moss has played his way out of the Pirates' starting lineup, and Hansen has not pitched since April 19 because of a rare nerve condition in his neck.

Epstein struck again this year at the deadline when he acquired catcher/first baseman Victor Martinez from the Indians for right-hander Justin Masterson and pitching prospects Nick Hagadone and Bryan Price. Martinez has a .320 EqA with the Red Sox and they hold an affordable club option on him for \$7 million club next season. Martinez has helped the Red Sox top the American League wild-card race as they hold a three-game edge on the Rangers with 22 to play.

"Our process at the trade deadline has remained the same since 2003: Assuming we have a realistic chance of reaching the postseason, we try to improve the club for the stretch run while maintaining a long-term focus, both in the terms of the players/contracts/(compensatory) picks that we acquire and the players we have to surrender," Epstein told the Boston Herald's Michael Silverman.

Bay has a unique perspective of Epstein's deadline work as he was part of it last year. Bay has been impressed. "Ultimately it comes down to how bad do you want it?" Bay said. "Everyone wants something but are you willing to give it up? In Victor's case, (the Red Sox) gave up a lot of young guys, and because of that you have to know what you're getting. I think they did know. A lot of teams make trades and there's a lot of hemming and hawing but this is one of those places where everything you do is scrutinized. You do a trade, especially a deadline deal, it seems like they've been fairly big. You'd like to think they always work out, but you've got to have the (guts) to do it, put it that way."

---MLB Rumors and Rumbblings: The Braves are considering trading right-hander Javier Vazquez in the offseason to add some much-needed offense. ... Astros closer Jose Valverde plans to test the free-agent market at the end of the season, meaning he is likely as good as gone. ... Cubs right-hander Jeff Samardzija, the former star wide receiver at Notre Dame, denies speculation that he is considering quitting baseball to give the NFL a shot. ... The White Sox plan to re-sign Freddy Garcia to round out a rotation that will include Jake Peavy, Mark Buehrle, John Danks, and Gavin Floyd. ... The Cardinals want to re-sign super-utilityman Mark DeRosa before he can because a free agent at the end of the season. ... The Padres plan to retain interim hitting coach Randy Ready, who was promoted from his job as manager at Triple-A Portland in July to replace the fired Jim Lefebvre. ... The Twins plan to make a push to re-sign right-hander Carl Pavano, who can become a free agent at season's end. ... The Nationals would like Cristian Guzman to move to second base if they acquire a shortstop via trade or free agency over the winter.

You can blame Cox for Atlanta's shortcomings by Ken Rosenthal

Bobby Cox, like Joe Torre, routinely is criticized for overworking relievers. He did it again this season, even though the stellar performances of Braves right-hander Peter Molyan and lefty Mike Gonzalez since the All-Star break indicate otherwise.

Perhaps the better question is: Did Cox push too hard with his team's two best sluggers, catcher Brian McCann and third baseman Chipper Jones?

The evidence suggests yes.

The Braves' chances of reaching the postseason all but ended when they went 1-6 between Sept. 2 and 9. McCann was 1-for-25 during that stretch, Jones 2-for-20 with two walks.

Both also faltered in August, but Jones played in all but three of the Braves' 28 games that month, McCann all but four. The team surged back into contention by going 16-9 between Aug. 4 and Sept. 1, then crashed.

The Braves' rotation ERA — second-best in the National League — is a terrible thing to waste. Then again, perhaps nothing could have changed the outcome of the Braves' season. The team simply was not good enough offensively.

This will be the fourth straight season that the Braves have missed the playoffs after qualifying in 14 straight. General manager Frank Wren did excellent work upgrading the rotation and trading for center fielder Nate McLouth. Yet, as Joe Sheehan of Baseball Prospectus recently pointed out, the Braves sure could have used Adam Dunn instead of Garret Anderson.

Well, no GM bats 1.000. No manager does, either. But Jones, 37, could end up playing his most games since 2003 while producing career-low numbers. McCann, 25, spent time on the disabled list with an infected left eye, but has started 108 of the 130 games for which he was active.

It's not as if Cox lacked quality alternatives for both players — he had Omar Infante and Martin Prado for Jones, David Ross for Martin. It's just that, like most managers, he sticks with the players he trusts most — and the relievers he trusts most, too.

Moylean, who started the season just 11 months removed from Tommy John surgery, leads the NL with 79 appearances. Gonzalez, who underwent the surgery in May 2007, ranks third with 73. A third Braves reliever, Rafael Soriano, is tied for 11th with 67 appearances after missing the final two months of last season with elbow inflammation.

If the Braves had remained in contention, playing tight games every night, their bullpen likely would have collapsed. Wren, due to expiring contracts, will need to find fresh arms regardless. Gonzalez and Soriano, both free agents, could be too pricey for the Braves — and too much a risk. Moylean, who is eligible for arbitration for the first time, likely will return.

Cox, 68, likely will manage the Braves as long as he desires, and there is no indication that he is ready to step down. He remains a terrific manager on many levels — players love him and play hard for him.

The question, if only this once, is whether he got the most out of them.

Padres' 2010 payroll: At least \$40 million

Over the weekend, I mentioned in my "Full Count" video that some in baseball suspect that the Padres will trade first baseman Adrian Gonzalez or closer Heath Bell and reduce their 2010 payroll to the \$25 million range.

Not true, according to one source with knowledge of the team's plans.

While ownership has yet to give the front office a final budget, it is planning a payroll of at least \$40 million for next season, the source says.

That's good news for the Padres, whose 2010 obligations, including arbitration-eligible players, currently project to be in the low \$30 million range.

General manager Kevin Towers says the team can be a surprise contender next season, the '10 version of the Giants. The Padres' rotation will not be nearly as strong as the Giants', but their bullpen could be as good and their offense and defense better.

A payroll of at least \$40 million would allow the team to sign at least one free-agent starting pitcher to complement Chris Young, Mat Latos, Clayton Richard and possibly Kevin Correia.

The Padres have won six straight series, five against teams that were or are in contention. They prevailed over the Rockies and Nationals at home, the Giants, Dodgers, Marlins and Braves on the road.

Entering Monday's play, the team's 27-17 record since July 28 was the fifth best in the majors.

"There's certainly light at the end of the tunnel," Towers says.

The Rays: One more chance?

The Rays' 11-game losing streak, which ended with an 8-4 victory over the Orioles on Monday night, will not fundamentally change the way the team assesses its future.

In the Rays' view, their players remain talented, their window of opportunity remains open at least through next season and their chances of trading left fielder Carl Crawford or center fielder B.J. Upton remain quite slim.

Crawford is under team control for one more season; the Rays can take one more shot with him and then recoup two high draft picks when he departs as a free agent. Another low-revenue team, the A's, employed a similar strategy earlier in the decade with players such as Jason Giambi and Johnny Damon.

Upton, under team control for three more seasons, represents a more difficult call. His upside remains tremendous, but his makeup is a concern. The Rays still think he cares enough to become a great player. Teams such as the Angels and Royals would love to find out.

The Rays could replace Upton with Fernando Perez, who missed virtually all of this season after undergoing surgery on his left wrist, or Desmond Jennings, who had an .888 OPS while spending about three-fourths of his season at Class AA and the rest at AAA.

Another option for the Rays would be to trade Perez or Jennings to fill another need.

Dodgers' Billingsley fading fast

The Dodgers are considering skipping the next turn of right-hander Chad Billingsley, who is 0-3 with a 6.00 ERA in his last four starts. Billingsley's delivery is an issue, and some team officials question his makeup, too.

Young players do not always progress in linear fashion. Billingsley has gone backward, as has catcher Russell Martin offensively, while center fielder Matt Kemp and right fielder Andre Ethier have taken a step forward.

Thus, Billingsley and Martin are starting to face the same questions that Upton faces with the Rays: Are they willing to work like Derek Jeter, Albert Pujols and Alex Rodriguez? Do they want it badly enough?

If Billingsley makes a mechanical adjustment, the other concerns about him might diminish. When he lands on his heel, he spins his toe toward first base while finishing his delivery. He needs to square up more toward home plate to get better finish on his pitches, one team official says.

Hey Charlie, easy on Pedro

Pedro Martinez's 130-pitch outing against the Mets on Sunday night raised at least two questions:

Why didn't other teams see more promise in Martinez, who is 5-0 with a 2.87 ERA for the Phillies?

What the heck was manager Charlie Manuel thinking when he allowed Martinez to throw his most pitches in a start since May 1, 2001? Martinez turns 38 on Oct. 25. He is coming off three straight injury-marred seasons. And the Phillies might need him in their postseason rotation if lefty J.A. Happ does not recover sufficiently from an oblique injury.

Yet Manuel treated Martinez as if he were some workhorse from the 1960s, stretching him to 119 pitches in his previous start before going to 130 with him on Sunday.

As the following chart shows, Martinez's two-game total of 249 pitches is the second-highest by a pitcher in back-to-back starts this season, according to STATS LLC:

Count it out		
Pitcher	Number of pitches	Dates
Justin Verlander	251	8-30/9-4
Pedro Martinez	249	9-18/9-13
Tim Lincecum	248	8-23/8-28
Gil Meche	247	6-10/6-16
Roy Oswalt	245	6-13/6-19

Scioscia's award-worthy effort

In any other season, the debate over AL Manager of the Year would be a spirited discussion involving the Rangers' Ron Washington, Tigers' Jim Leyland and even the Yankees' Joe Girardi. But this season, it's difficult to imagine anyone but the Angels' Mike Scioscia winning the award.

The death of right-hander Nick Adenhardt in April rocked the organization, but Scioscia showed not just strong leadership, but also the appropriate respect to the Adenhardt family. The Angels have dealt with numerous injuries and used 14 starting pitchers, but the loss of Adenhardt haunts them each day.

I asked Scioscia over the weekend if this has been his most trying season. I knew it was a foolish question the moment the words left my mouth; Adenhardt was gone forever. Regardless, Scioscia gave an eloquent answer:

"There's nothing that prepares you for that, nothing that prepares a family for that. We're playing with heavy hearts.

"Watching the Adenhardt family, the mom and dad, the extended family, trying to get through this tragedy, it's tough. Every day, there's always something that pops into your mind. You see his locker, a highlight will come up. It brings you back to that night."

Which way Jays?

The Blue Jays have not said whether Paul Beeston will remain CEO beyond this season, whether general manager J.P. Ricciardi will return for the final year on his contract, whether their payroll in 2010 will rise or fall.

The Jays are but a small part of the Rogers Communications empire in Canada, and their ownership is among the least involved in the game. But before team officials can start to plan for next season, they will need direction.

The next CEO, according to one source with knowledge of the Jays' situation, is likely to be more business-oriented than baseball-oriented, someone with Canadian ties. That person presumably would decide the future of Ricciardi, who is widely believed to be in trouble.

Rogers originally indicated it would raise the '09 payroll from \$97.8 million to \$110 million, but cut back to \$80 million due to economic concerns. The Jays since have purged the salaries of right fielder Alex Rios and third baseman Scott Rolen, but still have \$68.5 million committed to seven players next season.

Some good things happened for the Jays this season — second baseman Aaron Hill and left fielder/DH Adam Lind developed into stars, left-hander Ricky Romero and several other young pitchers showed promise, outfielder Travis Snider and catcher J.P. Arencibia continued their developments into potential cornerstones.

Looking back, the Jays' 27-14 start was an illusion — the team played only three games against the Yankees during that stretch and none against the Red Sox. But the Jays had three straight winning seasons before this one and offer at least some hope for the future. But first, ownership must decide the next step.

[Economy hits minors, too](#)

September 14, 2009 6:57 PM

As Baseball America's Josh Leventhal writes, [the economy has hit baseball's minor leagues](#):

For the first time in six years, minor league baseball did not set an attendance record.

The economic slowdown proved too great for even the debut of six new ballparks to overcome. Final overall attendance is expected to be announced later this week, but MLB spokesman Steve Densa confirmed today that a new record was not reached in 2009.

Replacing failing markets with new ones, and swapping aging ballparks with state-of-the-art facilities has been at the heart of minor league baseball's recent growth. Last year, the sport rode the coattails of three new ballparks to overcome the recession and set a new standard by drawing 43,263,740.

Optimism remained that a similar model could work this year, even as the minors began its first full season in the economic slowdown. Six new ballparks debuted in 2009 (a seventh expected opening, in Winston-Salem, was pushed back until next season due to financing complications).

Some of the new ballparks "worked" -- the Columbus Clippers were tops in the minors in their new building -- and some didn't, but I don't think it matters much either way. This isn't like the majors, where two or three new ballparks can impact attendance significantly. Including the rookie-level leagues, there are 187 domestic minor-league teams that sell tickets. Six new ballparks can make hardly a ripple.

I figured attendance would be down a little in the majors, but that TV ratings would hold steady (at worst) and so would minor-league attendance. About the first of those, I was right (though attendance has dropped a tad more than I expected). But about the other two, we (or at least I) just don't know yet. I haven't seen any local TV ratings, which are essentially the only ratings that really matter. And minor-league baseball not setting a new record doesn't mean that attendance dropped significantly.

My guess? Professional baseball in all its manifestations -- majors, minors, independent -- is perfectly healthy, and where attendance has flagged, it will pick up when the economy does. Everybody else has taken a hit this year; why shouldn't baseball